

## Message Text

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SUBJECT: NATO STUDY ON IMPLICATIONS OF REOPENING OF THE  
SUEZ CANAL

REF: USNATO 0080

1. THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS MAY BE USED AS THE US CONTRI-  
BUTION TO NATO STUDY ON IMPLICATIONS OF REOPENING THE SUEZ  
CANAL AT POLADS MEETING JANUARY 21.

2. BEGIN UNDERLINE: THE EFFECT OF AN OPEN CANAL ON SOVIET  
NAVAL CAPABILITIES TO OPERATE AND MAINTAIN MILITARY FORCES  
IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AREA. END UNDERLINE. A REOPENED SUEZ  
CANAL WOULD IMPROVE SOVIET NAVAL FLEXIBILITY BY SUBSTANTIA-  
LLY SHORTENING THE TRANSIT TIME TO THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN  
FROM THEIR WESTERN FLEET OPERATING AREAS. THE REDUCTION IN  
TRANSIT TIME TO THE INDIAN OCEAN WOULD NOT BE GREAT ENOUGH  
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IN ITSELF TO CAUSE A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF  
SHIP-DAYS ON STATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. IT WOULD, HOW-  
EVER, REDUCE THE LOGISTICS PROBLEM OF SUPPORTING AN INDIAN  
OCEAN NAVAL PRESENCE. ASSUMING AN OVERALL AVERAGE SPEED OF

16 KNOTS, TRANSIT TIME FROM THE BLACK SEA (SEVASTOPOL) TO BERBERA, SOMALIA WOULD BE 8 DAYS AND TO DIEGO GARCIA 13 DAYS. TRANSIT TIMES FROM THE PACIFIC FLEET, WHICH NOW SUPPLIES THE UNITS FOR INDIAN OCEAN DEPLOYMENTS, ARE 17 DAYS

TO BERBERA AND 14 DAYS TO DIEGO GARCIA. FOR CRISIS-IN-SPIRED DEPLOYMENTS, THE SOVIET MEDITERRANEAN FORCE WOULD, FROM ITS NORMAL ANCHORAGES, BE ONLY ABOUT 9 DAYS FROM THE PERSIAN GULF AREA AS COMPARED TO THE 17 DAYS NECESSARY FOR THE PACIFIC FLEET SHIPS TO REACH THE GULF.

3. THE SIZE OF THE SOVIET NAVY, IN TERMS OF SURFACE COMBATANTS, WILL PROBABLY REMAIN ABOUT CONSTANT OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS. THE USSR IS INVESTING IN MODERN SHIPS AND IMPROVING THE CAPABILITIES OF RECENTLY CONSTRUCTED ONES. AT THE SAME TIME IT IS RETIRING OLDER VESSELS AT ABOUT THE SAME RATE AS IT COMMISSIONS NEW ONES. THE RESULT IS A NAVY OF GROWING CAPABILITIES FOR DISTANT OPERATIONS BUT ONE OF NUMERICAL STABILITY. ANY SUBSTANTIAL BUILDUP IN THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THE SHORT TERM, THEREFORE, WOULD REQUIRE MOSCOW TO DRAW UPON OTHER NAVAL FORCES. OVER THE LONGER TERM, HOWEVER, THE GREATER CAPABILITY OF THE NEW SHIPS WILL, IN EFFECT, INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SHIPS AVAILABLE FOR DISTANT OPERATIONS.

4. SHIP-DAYS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN HAVE RISEN FROM ABOUT 1,000 IN 1968, WHEN CONTINUOUS SOVIET DEPLOYMENT BEGAN, TO ABOUT 5,000 IN 1973, BUT STILL ACCOUNT FOR LESS THAN 15 PERCENT OF THE SHIP-DAYS SPENT AWAY FROM THE USSR. THE TYPICAL SOVIET FORCE THERE DURING 1973 INCLUDED ONE GUN-ARMED CRUISER OR MISSILE-EQUIPPED SHIP, TWO DESTROYERS OR DESTROYER ESCORTS, ONE MINECRAFT, AN AMPHIBIOUS SHIP, A DIESEL SUBMARINE, AND SIX AUXILIARIES. UNDER ORDINARY CONDITIONS, OPERATIONS ARE LIMITED TO PORT VISITS AND EXTENDED PERIODS AT ANCHOR IN THE NORTHWESTERN PORTION OF THE OCEAN. MOST OF THESE SHIPS ARE DRAWN FROM THE PACIFIC. SINCE 1968 NAVAL UNITS BUILT IN THE WESTERN USSR HAVE BEEN  
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TRANSFERRED TO THE PACIFIC VIA THE INDIAN OCEAN. THESE SHIPS NORMALLY OPERATE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN BEFORE CONTINUING TO VLADIVOSTOK AND ACCOUNT FOR LESS THAN 20 PERCENT OF THE SOVIET SHIP DAYS IN THE AREA. THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT SENT NAVAL UNITS FROM THEIR WESTERN FLEETS TO THE INDIAN OCEAN IN RESPONSE TO A CRISIS.

5. IN ADDITION TO THIS CONTINUOUS PRESENCE, THE SOVIETS ARE CAPABLE OF AUGMENTING THEIR NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN DURING PERIODS OF HEIGHTENED TENSION. SOVIET DEPLOYMENTS DURING THE INDO-PAKISTANI WAR EVENTUALLY BROUGHT THEIR FORCE LEVEL THERE TO EIGHT SURFACE COMBATANTS, FOUR SUBMARINES, AND SOME AUXILIARIES. FOLLOWING

THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF 1973, THE SOVIETS ALSO SENT  
ADDITIONAL UNITS INTO THE AREA. REOPENING THE SUEZ CANAL

WOULD ENABLE THE SOVIETS TO AUGMENT THEIR NAVAL PRESENCE  
IN WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN MORE QUICKLY THAN THEY NOW CAN  
DURING A PERIOD OF CRISIS.

6. THE PRESENT INDIAN OCEAN FORCE LEVEL IS NOT LIMITED BY  
A CLOSED SUEZ CANAL. THE SOVIETS HAVE, OVER THE LAST FEW  
YEARS, DEVELOPED OPERATING PATTERNS FOR THEIR PRINCIPAL  
SURFACE COMBAT SHIPS WHICH PROVIDE FOR:

(A) A SIZABLE PERMANENT FORCE DEPLOYED IN THE MEDITERRAN-  
EAN;

(B) READY FORCES NEAR THE IMPORTANT COASTAL AREAS OF THE  
USSR;

(C) A FEW SHIPS FROM EACH FLEET AREA IN READINESS FOR  
CONTINGENCIES ABROAD;

(D) ABOUT FIVE COMBATANTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND ONE OR  
TWO OFF WEST AFRICA;

(E) A FEW ADDITIONAL SHIPS VISITING FOREIGN PORTS IN  
OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD, AND;

(F) SUFFICIENT SHIPS UNDERGOING OVERHAUL, REPAIR, AND  
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WORKUP TO SUPPORT THE OPERATIONS.

7. THE SOVIETS WOULD HAVE TO DRAW DOWN NAVAL FORCES NOW  
ALLOCATED TO OTHER TASKS TO INCREASE SUBSTANTIALLY THE  
NUMBER OF PRINCIPAL SURFACE COMBATANTS THEY DEPLOY ON A  
CONTINUING BASIS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN.

8. BEGIN UNDERLINE. FACTORS BEARING ON SOVIET DEPLOY-  
MENT LEVELS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. END UNDERLINE. A NUMBER  
OF FACTORS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER, AND TO WHAT EXTENT, THE  
USSR WILL ALTER ITS PRESENT PRIORITIES TO PROVIDE FOR A  
LARGER INDIAN OCEAN DEPLOYMENT IF THE SUEZ CANAL IS REOPEN-  
ED. THESE INCLUDE:

(A) THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES SEEN IN THE REGION;

(B) THE POLITICAL COSTS AND RISKS OF AN EXPANDED PRESENCE;

(C) THE EFFECTS ON NAVAL FLEXIBILITY;

(D) THE SHORE FACILITIES AVAILABLE AND ANTICIPATED;

(E) AND THE ACTIONS OF OTHER POWERS.

9. BEGIN UNDERLINE. POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES. END UNDERLINE. THE SOVIETS WOULD LIKE TO PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. THEY PROBABLY EXPECT CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL CHANGE OVER THE NEXT DECADE IN THE PERSIAN GULF, SAUDI ARABIA, AND THE HORN OF AFRICA. THEY WOULD LIKE TO BE IN A POSITION TO INFLUENCE AND PROFIT FROM SUCH CHANGES. A NAVAL PRESENCE IS A USEFUL ELEMENT IN A COMBINED APPROACH WHICH UTILIZES POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SUBVERSIVE, AND MILITARY AID INSTRUMENTS AS WELL. IT WOULD BE A VISIBLE REMINDER THAT THE USSR IS CAPABLE OF PROTECTING ITS OWN INTERESTS AND THOSE OF ITS INDIAN OCEAN FRIENDS. THE SOVIETS PERCEIVE THAT THIS CAPABILITY WILL ENHANCE SOVIET PRESTIGE AND PLACE THE USSR IN A STRONGER POSITION TO COMPETE FOR POLITICAL INFLUENCE AMONG INDIAN OCEAN NATIONS.

10. BEGIN UNDERLINE. POLITICAL RISKS. END UNDERLINE.  
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IN CONTEMPLATING AN EXPANDED NAVAL PRESENCE, THE SOVIETS WILL BE CONSCIOUS OF A NUMBER OF RISKS. INSOFAR AS THEY USE LOCAL SHORE FACILITIES, THEY RISK SUDDEN LIMITATIONS OR EVEN EJECTIONS BY THE HOST GOVERNMENT. IN LIGHT OF THEIR EXPERIENCE IN EGYPT AND SUDAN, THEY RECOGNIZE THAT SOMALIA, THE PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN, AND IRAQ COULD BE TRANSFORMED INTO POLITICALLY EMBARRASSING LOSSES BY VIRTUE OF A CHANGE IN POLICY OR EVEN GOVERNMENT. THE USSR WILL BE WARY OF EXCESSIVE INVOLVEMENT WITH ONE PARTY TO A REGIONAL RIVALRY LEST IT COMPROMISE ITS PROSPECTS WITH THE OTHER PARTY. HAVING REPRESENTED SOVIET POLICY AND PRESENCE IN THE AREA AS AIMED AT THE EXPULSION OF "US IMPERIALISM", THE USSR MUST MANAGE ITS OWN PRESENCE WITH SOME CARE, LEST IT BE INTERPRETED AS THE PRESENCE THERE OF A NEW IMPERIAL POWER.

11. BEGIN UNDERLINE. NAVAL FLEXIBILITY. END UNDERLINE. THE OPENING OF THE CANAL WOULD GIVE THE SOVIETS, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1967, THE CAPABILITY FOR SIGNIFICANTLY AND RAPIDLY REINFORCING THEIR NAVAL STRENGTH IN THE ARABIAN SEA AREA FROM THEIR MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEA NAVAL FORCE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE USSR WILL RECOGNIZE THAT THE SUEZ CANAL IS SUBJECT TO CLOSURE IN A CRISIS. IN SOME CASES, THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT MIGHT DO SO, OR AN INVOLVED PARTY MIGHT SCUTTLE ONE OF ITS SHIPS IN MID-CANAL. THE USSR WOULD NOT WISH TO BE CAUGHT WITH A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF AVAILABLE NAVAL UNITS ON THE WRONG END OF A BLOCKED CANAL. NEVERTHELESS, IN SITUATIONS

WHERE THE SPEED OF THE SOVIET RESPONSE WOULD BE CRITICAL, THE POSSIBLE CLOSURE OF THE CANAL WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE

CRUCIAL TO A SOVIET DECISION TO DEPLOY FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN.

12. THE REOPENING OF THE SUEZ CANAL WOULD GIVE THE USSR CERTAIN OTHER ADVANTAGES:

(A) INTER-FLEET TRANSFERS WOULD BE EASIER;

(B) IN FUTURE CRISIS IT COULD MAKE QUICKER AND LARGER DELIVERIES OF MILITARY AID TO CLIENT STATES IN THE AREA  
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EAST OF SUEZ;

(C) UNITS DEPLOYED IN THE INDIAN OCEAN COULD BE SUPPLIED; AT SOME SAVINGS, BY SUPPORT SHIPS COMING THROUGH THE CANAL.

13. AT PRESENT, US FORCES IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC CAN DEPLOY TO THE AREA MORE QUICKLY THAN CAN THE SOVIET FROM VLADIVOSTOK. WITH THE CANAL OPEN BOTH THE US AND THE SOVIETS COULD SEND REINFORCEMENTS FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN. SOME ADVANTAGES WOULD ACCRUE TO THE SOVIETS IN

DEPLOYING FORCES FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN:

(A) THE SOVIETS COULD REPLACE SURFACE SHIPS DRAWN FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN MORE QUICKLY THAN COULD THE US;

(B) ALL MAJOR SOVIET SURFACE COMBATANTS COULD TRANSIT THE CANAL WHEREAS 12 TO THE 14 US ATTACK AIRCRAFT CARRIERS COULD NOT.

14. BEGIN UNDERLINE. SHORE FACILITIES. END UNDERLINE. THE SOVIET NAVY HAS TRADITIONALLY TAKEN CARE TO AVOID DEPENDENCE ON FOREIGN FACILITIES; IN THE INDIAN OCEAN IT MAKES SUBSTANTIAL USE OF BERBERA FOR REPLENISHMENT AND MINOR REPAIRS -- BUT LOSS OF ITS RIGHTS THERE WOULD BE LITTLE MORE THAN AN INCONVENIENCE. IF THE SUEZ CANAL WERE REOPENED, LOGISTIC REQUIREMENTS WOULD BE EASED, AND THE VALUE OF SHORE FACILITIES WOULD ON THIS ACCOUNT DECLINE. ON THE OTHER HAND, ANY INCREASE IN THE SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN COULD WORK IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION. THE SOVIETS PROBABLY HOPE TO INCREASE THEIR CAPABILITIES FOR AIR RECONNAISSANCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN, AND THIS WOULD INVOLVE A GREATER NEED FOR ACCESS TO SHORE FACILITIES. THESE FACTORS SUGGEST THAT THE USSR WILL BE INTERESTED IN IMPROVED SHORE FACILITIES IN THE LITTORAL STATES,

BUT THAT THEIR AVAILABILITY WILL NOT BE A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN MOSCOW'S BROAD NAVAL POLICY IN THE REGION.

15. SOMALIA AND THE PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN  
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WILL CONTINUE TO PRESENT THE BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIMITED USE OF SHORE FACILITIES AND BOTH OF THOSE GOVERNMENTS MAY ACCEPT SOME INCREASED SOVIET PRESENCE. THE SOVIETS PROBABLY WILL ALSO MAKE MORE CALLS TO THE PORT THEY HELPED BUILD AT UMM QASR IN IRAQ, BUT ITS LOCATION AT THE HEAD OF THE NARROW PERSIAN GULF ARGUES AGAINST MAJOR SOVIET USE OF IT. MOSCOW IS UNLIKELY TO SUCCEED IN ITS EFFORTS TO ACQUIRE NAVAL FACILITIES IN INDIA. SOVIET SHIPS WILL PROBABLY INCREASE THE NUMBER OF PORT CALLS AT THOSE PLACES THEY HAVE USED IN THE PAST. IN THE MAJORITY OF THESE COUNTRIES THE HOST NATION WILL SEEK TO BALANCE SOVIET AND WESTERN PORT USE, AND THIS IS NOT LIKELY TO CHANGE WITH THE OPENING OF THE CANAL.

16. WHETHER OR NOT THE SUEZ CANAL IS REOPENED, THE SOVIET UNION IS LIKELY TO INCREASE ITS CONTINUOUS DEPLOYMENTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. THIS INCREASE IS LIKELY TO BE GRADUAL, LEADING TO A CONTINUOUSLY DEPLOYED FORCE OF 8-12 SURFACE COMBATANTS IN 1976 OR 1977. SUCH A MEASURED APPROACH WOULD ENABLE THE USSR TO GAUGE THE REACTIONS OF THE LITTORAL STATES, WOULD ALLOW FOR A CONTINUOUS EVALUATION OF WESTERN RESPONSES, AND WOULD RUN THE LEAST RISK OF GENERATING A WESTERN RESPONSE, IN BOTH MILITARY AND POLITICAL TERMS. THE SOVIETS WOULD PROBABLY BE UNABLE TO SUSTAIN AN INDIAN OCEAN FORCE SIGNIFICANTLY LARGER THAN THAT PRESENTLY DEPLOYED, HOWEVER, WITHOUT REORDERING THEIR PRIORITIES AND SHIFTING NAVAL FORCES

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